

Message #6

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1 Timothy

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## WANTED: A FEW GOOD MEN

### 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7

#### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

This past Wednesday was Veterans' Day. We elders put on a breakfast for our homeschool co-op for the occasion. Mike had a little military display and explained to the kids the meaning of Veterans' Day.

The day before that was another anniversary that has significance in our nation's military history. Anyone know what that anniversary is about? On November 10, 1775, the Continental Congress formed the group that has come down to us as the Marine Corps. (PROJECTOR ON--- TUN TAVERN) The proprietor of Tun Tavern in Philadelphia was given the job to raise two battalions of Marines. So the Tun Tavern has become known as the birthplace of the Marine Corps. Every leatherneck and jarhead who has gone through the Corps has learned that story.

Through the years the Marines have maintained a reputation for toughness and commitment. They have the toughest physical fitness requirements of any of the military branches. (SEMPER FIDELIS) Their motto is *Semper Fidelis*, "always faithful." Part of their ethic is to never leave behind a wounded Marine, and, as much as possible, to never leave behind a dead Marine. There are also no former Marines. Once you are a Marine, you are always a Marine. If you want to get someone who has served as a Marine worked up, ask them if they are a former Marine.

The Marine Corps is also the military branch which has been the slowest to integrate women into their force, especially into combat units. In 2016 the Defense Department ordered the Marines to open up combat slots for women. As of a couple of years ago, there were still fewer than 100 women who were in positions that are regarded as combat jobs. Part of the reason is the tough physical requirements. (MARINE RECRUITING MOTTO) So it is that down through the years the Marine recruiting motto, "Wanted: A Few Good Men," has remained a popular slogan. That slogan first appeared March 20, 1779, In the *Providence Gazette*, when William Jones, Captain of the Marines on the frigate *Providence* advertised for recruits for his fighting ship.

(PROJECTOR OFF) The Bible says that Jesus Christ is also looking for a few good men--- a few good men to lead His church. Candidates for that job likewise are required to meet certain challenging qualifications. Today we are going to examine the qualifications which the New Testament lays down for these important church leadership positions. These characteristics are what we need to be looking for in our own church leaders. Most of these qualities are characteristics which all of us Christians should seek to be developing in our lives.

We are working our way through Paul's First Letter to Timothy. We have seen that the Apostle Paul was writing to his personal representative at the church in Ephesus, on the west coast of what we know today as Turkey. In Chapters 2 & 3 he gives Timothy specific directions about how the church should operate. After talking about the role and priority of prayer and the role of women in the church, which we looked at last week, Paul turns his attention to church leadership. As we examine these first seven verses of #3 (which is found on p. 991 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs), we will try to answer three questions: Who are the church leaders? What should they do? What are the qualifications for the job?

I.

Let's look at, first, the identity of these church leaders. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. WHO ARE THE OVERSEERS?) From v. 1 we are going to consider WHO ARE THE OVERSEERS? Paul writes, **"The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."**

The Greek word which Paul uses here for "overseer" is *episkopos*, from which we get the term "Episcopalian." The King James Version and some other translations have "bishop," which is also a legitimate translation. The root meaning of the term is "to manage," or "to oversee." Thus the term "overseer" has an inherent emphasis on the function of the individual holding the position.

Elsewhere in the New Testament the term "elder" is used of these church leaders. Christians and churches often make a distinction between these two terms. Some churches have separate positions of elder and bishop. It is important for us to understand that in the New Testament the two terms refer to the same position.

The term "elder" is rooted in the Old Testament. In the time of Moses it was used to describe men who assisted him in leading the children of Israel. These elders were tribal leaders of the nation. In the

Gospels we still see certain leaders of the Jews referred to as “elders.” The term itself has obvious reference to age and maturity. The term “overseer” emphasizes the work and duty involved in the job.

The two terms do refer to one and the same position. (TITUS 1:5) In Titus #1 v. 5 Paul tells Titus, **“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...”** In v. 6 the apostle describes what an elder should be like. Then in v. 7 (TITUS 1:7) he says, **“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain...”** Clearly the author is describing the same position.

Also in Acts #20, beginning in v. 17, mention is made of Ephesus, the city in which Timothy is serving in the time in which our passage was written. This incident happened several years earlier. (ACTS 20:17) The author Luke writes, **“Now from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.”** Paul proceeds to encourage and challenge these elders.

In v. 28 (ACTS 20:28) he says to them, **“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God...”** It should be obvious that in the New Testament the position of elder and overseer, or bishop, is the same.

It is important also to realize that in the New Testament there is never only one elder who leads a church. There is always a plurality of elders. There are always several elders leading a church. We have just seen from Acts 20 that Paul called for the elders--- plural--- of the church--- singular--- at Ephesus. Back in Acts 14 v. 23 (ACTS 14:23) there is a description of Paul’s first missionary journey and his church planting work in Asia Minor. In v. 23 the author Luke writes, **“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”**

The Book of Philippians (PHILIPPIANS 1:1) begins in this way: **“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.”** Philippi at this time had one church. James 5:14 (JAMES 5:14) reads, **“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”** This is the consistent view of leadership in the New Testament. None of these churches had just one elder or pastor.

The question naturally arises: How does the pastor fit into all of this? (PROJECTOR OFF) The truth is that there was no office or position of pastor in the New Testament church. The only church offices were elder-overseer (or bishop) and deacon and deaconess. The term “pastor” appears in the New Testament, but it is only used in one of two ways. In Ephesians #4 v. 11 “pastor,” or “pastor-teacher,” is referred to as a spiritual gift. Some Christians, including women, may have the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher. But pastor-teacher is not an office, or position, in the New Testament church.

Then also pastoring is described as a responsibility of all of the elders of a church. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 PETER 5:1-2) First Peter #5 vv. 1 & 2 tell us, **“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you...”** The New Testament word for “pastor” is literally “shepherd.” Pastoring, or shepherding, is the responsibility of all elders. But there is no church office of “pastor” in the New Testament.

So am I trying to work myself out of a job? No, there is a Biblical basis for a full time vocational elder. We will find that later on in 1 Timothy. (1 TIMOTHY 5:17) In #5 v. 17 Paul writes, **“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”** By “honor” the context shows that Paul is speaking about financial support. So, Biblically speaking, the role which I have in this church is that of a full time, vocational elder. Probably we are not going to get away from the popular use of the term “pastor,” but we can be aware of how the New Testament uses the terms “pastor” and “elder” and overseer.” It seems to me that it is also legitimate to have female pastors in larger churches, as long as they are not serving as the teaching pastor, or as elders.

Let’s circle back for a moment to Paul’s reference to it being good for someone to aspire to the office of overseer. We are inclined to look at that statement through twenty-first century American eyes. To us, being chosen as an elder might be regarded as a nice honor which involves a little more work and responsibility. But in the first century, persecution against Christians was a reality. Becoming an elder might well mean putting a target on your back. At Ephesus it also meant instant personal conflict. For we have been seeing that there were false teachers in the church at Ephesus. Some of them had probably infiltrated the church leadership. So being chosen as an elder at the time when this letter was written meant that one was expected to go to work to confront, correct, and discipline these false teachers. Anyone willing to take on these responsibilities was taking on a noble, but burdensome, task. Still today, there are tough challenges that local church elders often address.

II.

Consider next the job of the elders, or overseers. WHAT SHOULD THEY DO? (II. WHAT SHOULD THEY DO?) The basic meaning of “bishop,” or “overseer” is one who manages, or oversees. So the basic responsibility of an elder is to be a leader. He is to give direction to the congregation.

A moment ago I cited 1 Peter #5. There the apostle told the elders to shepherd, or pastor, the local congregation. That imagery creates the picture of a shepherd with the sheep. Responsibilities of a shepherd include feeding, protecting, and guiding sheep. An important element in shepherding sheep is providing nourishment for them. In terms of a church, that means teaching. Sheep also need protection from wolves. The concern of both Paul and Timothy was that there were wolves at Ephesus who were seeking to lead the sheep astray and devour them.

It is important to understand that elders should be the human leaders of a local congregation. But if they are doing their job correctly, they should be very much aware that it is Jesus Christ who is, or should be, the real leader of any truly Christian church. Thus it is that the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians #1 vv. 22 & 23, **“And he [God] put all things under his [Christ’s] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”** So an important part of any elder’s job is seeking God’s will for his church.

Part of what we do as elders is to make sure that everyone who is a member or regular attender has an elder or deacon or deaconess assigned to them to keep up contact with them. Next month our new deacons and deaconesses and elders will meet and divvy up the congregation among us. If you don’t hear from an elder or deacon or deaconess in the next month after that, let us know. We want to make sure that someone in church leadership is at least praying for you in a regular way and keeping aware of any needs that you might have.

III.

The primary focus of the text before us today is the qualifications for elders, or overseers, of the church. WHAT SHOULD THEY BE? (III. WHAT SHOULD THEY BE?) Verses 2-7 describe the character qualities of men whom we want to have as elders. While the direct concern of the passage concerns elders, most of the qualities that Paul enumerates are characteristics of maturity. These are character traits that all of us as Christians should seek to develop.

Verses 2-7 list fifteen different characteristics for potential elders. As we work our way through this list, notice that the emphasis is not upon educational achievement, not upon career success, not upon

financial status, not upon popularity, and not even directly upon experience. The emphasis is upon character. How different that is from the way in which the world, and even sometimes Christians, evaluate people!

First on the list is that the overseer **is above reproach**. (III. WHAT SHOULD... 1. ABOVE REPROACH) That sounds like a high standard. We are all sinners. So we have to be careful about making that qualification unrealistically high. Basically the apostle means that the person in question has high standards. He has a reputation for integrity. He does not push the margins of what is morally acceptable. The following items on the list provide a more specific idea about what being above reproach means.

The first specific standard is that the overseer is to be **the husband of one wife**. (III. WHAT... 2. THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE) The clear assumption is that an elder is to be a male. We talked about gender role distinctions in the church last week. Exactly what Paul is saying here is somewhat uncertain. The Greek literally reads “a one woman man.” Some have understood this to mean that Paul is saying that an elder must be married. By this standard Paul and Timothy would both be excluded. If that was his main point, Paul could have used a simpler way of referring to a married man. The author, by the grammatical construction that he uses, appears to be placing an emphasis upon “one.”

Some have suggested that Paul was saying that an elder should not be a polygamist. I am sure that Paul did not favor polygamy. But Roman law already prohibited polygamy, and there is no Biblical or historical evidence that this was an issue in Ephesus or anywhere else in the early church.

Others understand Paul to be saying that a man who has been divorced and remarried is his concern. This interpretation, however, seems to be reading too much into the phrase. There is no mention of divorce here or anywhere else in the letter. There are other negative characteristics mentioned in this list. Christians have fallen short in many of these areas in the past. Does that mean that all of these negative qualities are permanently disqualifying? That seems very unlikely.

There are other Biblical texts that may come into consideration about divorce in regard to a candidate's consideration for being an elder. Good Christians take varying degrees of strictness in regard to marriage and divorce. Certainly passages such as 1 Corinthians #7 and Matthew #19 should be taken into consideration. Most students of the Scriptures also recognize that we start with a clean slate when we become Christians.

I have heard some even argue that remarriage for any reason disqualifies one to be an elder. If a man is an elder, his wife dies, and he remarries, he is no longer qualified to be an elder. I had a seminary professor who held this view. I don't see a rationale for this which makes sense. Paul himself said elsewhere that if a Christian's mate dies (Romans 7), he or she is free to remarry. Later in this very letter he speaks out against those who forbid marriage.

It seems best to me to understand that Paul is saying that an elder must be a one woman man. Sexual looseness was a major challenge at Ephesus, as it is in our world today. We live in a suburb of a metropolitan area that brags that what happens here stays here. Paul's concern seems to be that a married man has an obvious commitment to his wife. He has a solid marriage and a solid reputation in this regard. His behavior shows that he is a one woman man.

Paul also says in v. 2 that an elder is to be **sober-minded**. (III. 3. SOBER-MINDED) Originally that word had reference to alcohol. By this time it had a broader meaning. It meant "balanced." An elder is not to be prone to destructive extremes.

He is also to be **self-controlled**. (III. 4. SELF-CONTROLLED) Aristotle said this about the quality of self-control: "**It is desiring the right things in the right way and at the right time.**" It means having our appetites under control. It means not being subject to destructive habits.

The term **respectable** (III. 5. RESPECTABLE) was used in #2 v. 9 in regard to the dress of godly women. It referred to modesty of conduct and dress. Women are to have respectable dress. Candidates for elder should have respectable behavior.

The elder, and mature Christians in general, are also to be **hospitable**. (III. 6. HOSPITABLE) The word literally means "having love for strangers." Christian travelers back in that day had two choices for lodging. They could stay in a public inn, or they could stay in the home of a fellow Christian. Inns often had a poor reputation in the first century. They had a pagan atmosphere, and they supplied meat that had been offered to idols. Christians preferred to stay with fellow believers. But that often meant depending on the hospitality of strangers. Such was the importance of hospitality. The Apostle Paul had depended on it for much of his life.

Hospitality is still an admirable quality today. It reflects itself in an openness in the use of one's home and one's possessions, especially in regard to those outside of the circle of our immediate friends. Right

now we have an added complication that relates to our coronavirus pandemic. Simple friendliness is a demonstration of hospitality. In our church setting it means being on the lookout to welcome visitors and newer people in the congregation. Some people are just scoping the place out. So we don't want to overwhelm visitors. But genuine friendliness and warmth are always appropriate, and that isn't just the job of the pastor and elders.

The seventh quality is **able to teach**. (III. 7. ABLE TO TEACH) That does not necessarily mean that the elder has to be a great public speaker. Some of the best teaching takes place on a one-to-one level. I remember one elder from my first church ministry who was really a pretty bad public speaker. But he was just great when it came to working with people one-on-one. Ability to teach does mean that there must be a well-rounded knowledge of Bible doctrine and some ability to communicate it.

There is a parallel passage on the qualifications of overseers in Titus #1. We have already made an earlier reference to that chapter. In v. 9 of #1 Paul says this of the overseer: **"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."** Ability to teach is an important qualification. It is the only one in this list of fifteen that may have a direct connection to educational background.

In v. 3 we are told that the candidate for overseer must **not be a drunkard**. (III. 8. NOT A DRUNKARD) The text does not say that he must be a teetotaler. In fact, a little later Paul will encourage Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach. That is not to say that abstinence from alcohol is a bad policy. Choices of beverage were limited back in Paul's day. Sometimes wine was the only drink available, although it was usually watered down. At the very least, a church leader is not to have an undue fondness, or addiction, to alcohol.

The elder, and the mature Christian, is also **not to be violent**. (III. 9. NOT VIOLENT) Some of your translations use the word "pugnacious." The issue is how an individual handles differences with others. Does he engage in lots of gossip? Does he go around telling people what a horrible person this other individual is? Does he lose his temper with people?

Elders should instead be characterized by being **gentle**. (III. 10 GENTLE) They should have a soft touch in dealing with others. Once when I was a youth pastor, I went to watch a high school freshman football game where the son of one of the elders of the church was playing. Only a minute or two had gone by before this elder started yelling at the officials. Through most of the game, whenever a call went against his son's team, the elder from my church would start laying into the officials. I was appalled. I was



embarrassed to have this guy associated with my church. His behavior was totally contrary to the quality that Paul was describing here. He was not gentle. He was pugnacious.

An overseer should also be **not quarrelsome**. (III 11. NOT QUARRELSOME) There are few things more dangerous to a board of elders than to have someone who always insists on getting his own way, to have someone who is always looking for an opportunity to be disagreeable. There needs to be willingness to compromise on nonessential issues--- things like programming matters, the color of the carpet, the time of the service, the format of a Sunday meeting.

An elder, and a mature Christian, should also **not be a lover of money**. (III. 12. NOT A LOVER OF MONEY) This does not mean that a wealthy man must be excluded from serving as an elder. The reality is that sometimes poor people love money more than rich people. The issue is: What is our priority? What really motivates us in life? Which thing are we more likely to think about while we are laying in bed at night--- how to make more money, or how to serve God more effectively?

Notice vv. 4 & 5. After all of these brief descriptions of qualifications for elders, Paul spends two verses stressing the importance of one who **manages his own household well**. (III. 13. MANAGES HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD WELL) **“He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?”**

Family management reveals a lot about a person. It reveals his ability to handle finances. It demonstrates his capacity for love. It shows whether he has ability to teach and to discipline. It demonstrates leadership ability. It reveals personal priorities.

Verse 4 singles out the responsiveness of the children to the father's authority. Children who are generally obedient and under control usually reflect a family situation where dad--- and/or mom--- are doing a good job of managing the family. Christians are frequently described in the New Testament as being the family of God. Demonstrated skills in leading one's own immediate family are good qualifications for being a leader in the family of God.

Verse 6 plainly says that an overseer should **not be a new convert**. (III. 14. NOT A NEW CONVERT) Passage of time does not guarantee spiritual maturity, but maturity cannot develop without the passage of time. A new convert has usually not been tested very much. A new convert put in the position of an

elder could easily become proud. The devil is effective in stirring up problems when leaders become prideful.

The last qualification is described in v. 7. An overseer must be **well thought of by outsiders**. (III. 15. WELL THOUGHT OF BY OUTSIDERS) The Bible says that godly Christians will encounter opposition and persecution. But that persecution is to be the result of their Christian faith. At the same time believers are to be known for their integrity and love. When Daniel's rivals in the Persian government tried to force him out of office, they could not find the slightest hint of corruption in his record. He had a clean reputation. The only thing that they could use against him was his religious commitment

Years ago I worked for a short time in a computer company. There were two other Christians in the manufacturing department where I worked. They both had low level leadership positions. One of them was a newer Christian who was not well liked. The people with whom I worked saw him as overbearing, unreasonable, and difficult. The other Christian was Steve.

One day I asked a fellow employee who had worked at a number of different computer companies why he had been so long at this company. He said simply, **"I have never had as good a boss as Steve."** Steve had a good reputation with outsiders.

These then are the qualifications for being an overseer, or elder, of the church. The New Testament is less clear about how the selection process in a church is to take place. It is clear about who should be doing the ultimate appointing. In Acts #20 v. 28 Paul is speaking to the elders (ACTS 20 28) of the Ephesian church a number of years before the writing of 1 Timothy. He says, **"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God..."** It is the Holy Spirit who raises up and prepares elders. It is not the congregation. It is not the nominating committee. The job of the church and its leaders is to be on the lookout for men whom the Holy Spirit has prepared and qualified to be overseers.

Paul says in v. 1 of our passage that the office of overseer is a noble position. The implication is that to be an elder is a position for which it is worthy to aim. Even if that is not your aim, most of the qualifications that are listed here are characteristics for which we should all aspire.

Our passage does not directly address the question about how these characteristics are to be developed. Other parts of the New Testament tell us about that. The foundational requirement is that

we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul told a spiritual seeker, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31) We need to recognize that we are sinners in need of a Savior. We need to recognize that Jesus was both God and man and that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and that He rose again from the dead. If we will ask Him to be our Savior, if we will put our trust in Him, He will become part of our life, He will give us eternal life, He will forgive our sins, and He will develop in us the godly qualities that we have considered today.

Our responsibility as Christians is to trust in God, to live by faith in Him and His promises, and to trust Him to make us more like Jesus. As we do that the, Holy Spirit will develop these qualities in us.

Last Sunday we had our annual business meeting. One of the important things that we did as a church body was to approve a new slate of elders to provide leadership for our church. Those elders include myself, Mac Jaynes, Clive Bevan, Jerry Wilbur, and Jay Grandberry. Let's close in prayer by praying for God to demonstrate these godly characteristics as they take on this important role.

[Why don't several of you lead out in brief prayers for this new elder board, as well as for the other men and women who will serve in other church boards and positions in the church.]

